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ABSTRACT

Guidelines for the operation and general structure of the middle school are set down. A general outline for school personnel is detailed, including staff such as homeroom teachers, paraprofessional school aides, administrative personnel, and grade mentors. Other aspects of the middle school discussed are curriculum planning, teacher training, marks, alternate schools, and student government. (JB)

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A NATIONAL DESIGN FOR THE MIDDLE SCHOOL

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FOREWORD

Almost as soon as the right to collective bargaining began to be won by teachers in the early 1960's, members of the American Federation of Teachers started to translate their conceptions of optimum teaching and learning conditions into the language of collective bargaining contracts.

The first such design was negotiated for a selected number of elementary schools in New York City in 1964. Similar programs were incorporated into union contracts in Cleveland, Baltimore, Yonkers, Chicago and Detroit and into legislation in California and Colorado.

The most famous of these programs was the More Effective Schools plan in New York. It provided for four teachers for every three classes; class size maximums of 22 (15 in kindergarten); increased supportive personnel, such as psychologists, psychiatrists, speech and hearing therapists; reading, art, drama and other specialists; more teacher aides, and greater teacher and parent involvement in administrative decision making in the school.

The More Effective Schools program was tested, retested and tested again. Such agencies as the Psychological Corporation and the American Institutes for Research found that it accelerated the learning rate of children, just as the teachers who designed it planned that it would, and the United States Office of Education chose it as "exemplary." Project READ in Chicago, the Neighborhood Education Centers in Detroit and other saturation programs showed similar successes.

The demand for similar designs at all levels of education—from pre-school to the community college—prompted the Executive Council of the AFT to establish the Council for a Comprehensive Program for American Schools (COMPAS), under the chairmanship of Simon Beagle, who headed the National Council for Effective Schools for many years and is a nationally known advocate of grassroots teacher involvement in educational design and decision making.

The work of the various COMPAS committees under Mr. Beagle's tutelage has resulted in four National Designs—for the elementary school, the middle school, the high school and the community college. The AFT is proud to present its Comprehensive Program for American Schools as its answer to those critics who believe that the way to solve the problems in education is somehow to tinker with the only relationship which results in learning—that between the teacher and the taught.

David Selden, President
American Federation of Teachers

PREFACE

This report is the result of much thought and study by members in the American Federation of Teachers. The basic guidelines were first suggested by the Junior High School Committee of the United Federation of Teachers (UFT), AFT Local 2. These guidelines were studied and discussed at a series of AFT regional conferences held during the 1971-1972 school year. A tentative draft, including suggestions from these conferences, was prepared and submitted to AFT locals throughout the country for their reactions and suggestions. A final draft was then sent to the AFT Executive Council and submitted to the AFT 1972 National Convention. Both bodies unanimously approved the final report. Thus, the guidelines in this report are now AFT policy.

Simon Beagle, Chairman
National Council for a Comprehensive Program for American Schools (COMPAS)

April, 1973

INTRODUCTION

It is an accepted fact that the public schools are under attack. Warranted or not, widespread criticism from all geographical regions and from all levels of society attest to this. It is obvious that our country is in turmoil, and since schools reflect society, this unrest is mirrored in the classroom.

If there is validity to these conclusions, educators can go in one of two directions. Taking an extreme position, one can argue that educators can do nothing until society solves its basic ills and then the schools would simply fall into line and the problems wither away.

The AFT believes that this is a simplistic viewpoint and not responsible. We would urge instead that educators present and fight for superior educational arrangements and seek the support of other segments of society.

Therefore, we are offering the following National Design for the Middle School, and hope that our contribution will help in some way to achieve these goals.

GENERAL STRUCTURE

A typical student entering a middle school comes from a non-departmental elementary school. He usually arrives at an overcrowded school, is among the youngest in the building, changes classes each period, and is given considerably more freedom than he previously experienced. This has been the traditional pattern for middle school students. (Middle school is the term used to designate all schools that exist between elementary and senior high schools.)

It is our judgment that this sudden "freedom" is overwhelming and creates a feeling of instability and disorientation. At the same time, due to maturation, our middle school student deserves greater freedom. Hopefully, the structure of a middle school will provide appropriate flexibility within a stable structure. We are also in agreement with authorities that approximately 800 pupils is an appropriate size for a middle school. We couple this belief with the concept of the necessity for increased individual attention and this necessitates an increase in personnel.

Lowest Grade

1. Units of 4 classes, 20 students each. Three units (12 classes) to the grade.
2. The same 4 to 5 major subject teachers for each unit.
3. The major subject rooms for each unit should be physically adjacent to each other.
4. The major subject teachers should be collectively responsible for curriculum.
5. Large blocks of time should be allocated to the major subject teachers, which then can be subdivided as they deem proper.

Middle Grade

Here we have an older student, now familiar with the school, who, at this point, is capable of moving away from the "extended family" arrangement he experienced during his last term.

Therefore, we recommend that unit grouping be dropped and subject classes changed as is now customary in present day junior high school or intermediate school.

However, we should now begin to offer our student course electives in each of his required "minor" subjects.

Course descriptions should be printed, distributed and after consultation with teachers, parents and guidance counselors, each student should select one course in each of his required minor areas. This proposal for the middle grade should not eliminate the possibility for electives in *all* subjects if the faculty desires it.

Upper Grade

At this level, we should stress again the concept that promotion in school reflects the opportunity for greater responsibility and increased freedom. We should now offer electives in all areas, subject to adult

guidance. In the belief that a great deal of learning does, can and should go on outside of school, we want to expose our senior student to relevant informal learning, such as individual study or research, tutoring of younger students, school wide service, industry related work, community projects, or work for pay. All of the above should be appropriately supervised.

PERSONNEL

It is generally agreed by social critics and spokesmen in the fields of education, government, and industry that our present school system has become less and less able to respond to today's educational imperatives. Overcrowding, lack of funds, insufficient personnel, overall social turmoil and rising social expectations are some of the contributing factors.

If schools are to succeed, personnel sufficient in numbers and variety must be utilized. The staff of a school should determine the direction and atmosphere of a school. However well-meaning a faculty may be, it cannot perform its teaching responsibilities if it has inadequate facilities and personnel.

The AFT cannot provide "pat" answers, but simply a framework from which to start. The main task, therefore, is to see that adults, both inside and outside the classroom, be able to be flexible in attitude, action, and thought.

The school of today must be able to provide those facilities and services which help the students to work at their physical and mental optimum, in an atmosphere free of tension and pressures. For example, no educational expertise and counseling can be truly effective if the students are hungry. Whether through ignorance or poverty, many students come to school without breakfast or spend the day with either a snack or nothing for lunch. For these reasons, the AFT feels that our schools should provide free breakfast and lunch programs for all students.

If the role of the school is *in loco parentis*, we must be concerned with the physical need of the child as well as his mental development.

1. **Homeroom Teachers:** The AFT suggests twelve classes per grade with a total of thirty-six homeroom teachers for the three grades.
2. **Paraprofessionals:** A paraprofessional would assist each subject teacher. The paraprofessional's duties would be kept flexible. These would include assisting the teacher, working with small groups or individual students and preparing instructional material. Their presence in the classroom would not only be an educational asset, but would also provide a vital link between the school and the community.
3. **School Aides:** There must be sufficient school aides to perform all non-professional tasks and to relieve teachers of all administrative assignments.
4. **Administrative Personnel:** The administrative work of the schools would be taken care of by one principal, one administrative assistant and three secretaries assigned to each of the grade mentors.

5. **Grade Mentors:** One grade mentor at each grade level should supervise such activities as teacher training and curriculum planning. These grade mentors should be elected by the teachers in the school. The grade mentor is proposed because of the need for leaders who are primarily educators and who keep in touch, at the classroom level, with teachers and students. Administrators in conventional middle schools are too removed from the educational process to offer much real assistance to teachers or to give them needed educational direction.

In many of our neighborhoods, non-English speaking groups need special services. Education, especially the knowledge and comprehension of the English language, has always been the major force in the assimilation of the immigrant in America.

6. **Bilingual teachers in school and community relations** can help bridge the gap between the newcomer's family and the school which educates the child. These teachers have a variety of non-classroom functions. These include some home visits, speaking at meetings, and translating materials. By being able to communicate with the parents in their native language, the bilingual teacher is a liaison person who explains the role of the school, serves as a resource person regarding community services and assists the parents eventually to participate in school/home/community activities. The number of bilingual teachers will be determined by the needs of the school.

7. The Teacher of English as a second language (TESL) is in the classroom. His role is to prepare the students to become members of regular classes and to help the students adjust to their school environment. His classes are usually called "transition" or "orientation" classes. The length of the student's stay in these classes varies according to his ability to develop systematic control and fluency in English. At no time should the class register go beyond fifteen.

8. No school can function properly with an insufficient secretarial staff. The following licensed secretarial positions have been suggested:

a. one secretary for admissions and discharges
b. one secretary for the principal and administrative assistant
c. one secretary per grade (total = 3)
d. one secretary for the guidance department and clinical team
e. one secretary for all extra duty assignments
f. one secretary to handle payroll.

9. **Other Personnel:**

Absent Teacher Reserves—10% of the staff

Street Worker—one per grade

Attendance Teachers—two attendance teachers per school population of 800

Lab Assistant—one

Industrial Arts Assistant—one

Home Economics Assistant—one

Librarians—two

Library Assistant—to aid in use and care of multimedia material in the library

Speech Teacher—one

Clinical Team—one per school. The team will consist of the following:

a. one social worker
b. one psychologist
c. one part-time psychiatrist

Medical Team—one per school. The team shall consist of the following:

a. two full-time nurses
b. one part-time doctor
c. one dental hygienist
d. one part-time dentist
e. one part-time optometrist

Guidance Department—two licensed counselors per grade

CURRICULUM AND TEACHER TRAINING

Despite the limited space devoted to this topic in our report, this area is of major importance.

One of our basic principles is the involvement of the participants in the planning. The curriculum for each school should be developed by each staff to meet the particular needs of that school.

We recommend as part of the program a voluntary summer workshop for the entire staff with appropriate compensation. It is here that the specific staff for each of the schools will look afresh at their curriculum and devise, modify and update new ones.

We cannot emphasize too strongly the need for curriculum reform.

Increased flexibility, new or redesigned curricula, heightened sensitivity and greater student participation are the desired outcomes.

Any new program requires the complete understanding and support of the staff. It is imperative, therefore, that the summer workshop include sessions which encourage open discussion and offer legitimate insights into this new design.

This dialogue must also continue during the school term. Only in this way can proper support develop and become self-perpetuating.

MODIFIED HETEROGENEITY

Too often teachers in the middle schools have been confronted with the problem of class labeling. Some classes are labeled "bright," while others are labeled "slow." Unfortunately, this type of labeling cannot be avoided when classes are formed by homogeneous grouping. Whenever students are grouped by reading score or other ability factors, the school is by necessity placing the "bright" students in one class or group and the "slow" students in another class or group.

Regardless of how some schools have tried to disguise this homogeneity, the results of labeling are the same. Whether you call the class by exponent (6-1) or by room number (6-242), students and parents soon become aware of the situation, and the labeling game is on.

Therefore, we propose to break away from homogeneous grouping and to move toward heterogeneous classes. Realizing that teaching in a full heterogeneous program is virtually an impossible task for a teacher (even with paraprofessional aid), the proposal for the new "middle school" is based on what may be termed "modified heterogeneity."

We use this term to denote the fact that each class will have a greater degree of ability range, but that range will not reach extremes.

In the lower grade, all students in the class will be able to move along at the best individual rate, with students at the lower end of the class spectrum able to strive to move upward toward the higher end of the class spectrum. This goal will be a possible task, since there will not exist extremes in any of the classes. In the middle grade, the "modified heterogeneous class" structure will be used in the same manner with the additional factor of departmentalization. By the use of the departmentalization, a student may be moved into another group

for a specific subject in which the student is extremely strong or extremely weak.

In the upper grade complete individualized programming will be used.

MARKS

Numerical grading is, in our opinion, often arbitrary; it emphasizes for "poor students" the failure syndrome and it encourages "good" students to look for the "grade" rather than to reach for relevant satisfaction.

Education today is rapidly being assigned greater responsibility for the well-being and maturation of children, and as we move towards this new concept, the need for greater flexibility in evaluation coupled with better communication seems to be apparent. Some educators and parents have complained that our present marking system is too inflexible and lacking in meaningful communication. As part of the restructuring of the middle school, we must begin to find new ways of evaluating the student and communicating the true meaning of that evaluation to the persons most concerned.

In the earlier grades, report cards will be supplemented by a system of parent-teacher interviews. Several parent interviews are arranged each day untill all the parents have been seen.

A grading system should be established that would allow for recognition of progress and at the same time would eliminate the stigma of failure.

We therefore urge that numerical grades be eliminated and that subject area reports which indicate rates of progress on an individual basis be used.

ALTERNATE SCHOOLS

Hopefully this middle school design will effectively unite students and teachers in more productive school experiences.

What is still needed, however, is something like a "halfway house" for those pupils who are so alienated from school that it is virtually impossible to get them to attend school or to do any worthwhile work if they do attend.

This alternate school should be physically apart from the school, very small, even more flexible than our basic design and one whose aim is to restore adult contact with these pupils so that they are more willing and able to return to the "mainstream."

STUDENT GOVERNMENT

The proper role for a child whether at home or in school is always difficult to define.

The AFT is convinced that middle school students can be given much greater school responsibilities than is commonly practiced.

One of the tasks of the summer workshop will be the development of new guidelines for self-government which will result in greater in-

volvement for the students while not negating the professionals' responsibilities. It will be a task that must be done along with curriculum change. Some examples are:

1. Rules and enforcement of school behavior and decorum
2. School and program evaluations
3. Program suggestions
4. School-wide student workshops
5. Social activities
6. Community projects
7. Regular student leader—faculty meetings

CONCLUSION

The proposed model for a restructured middle school here is geared to meet the needs of perhaps the most complicated and demanding of students—those of the in-between years. It is designed to reach the potential dropout and the insecure student, as well as the over-achieving and ambitious one. It is anticipated that graduates of this new school will be more independent and have a clearer self-concept than those now entering our high schools. Hopefully they will feel that school is an exciting place to be and a place that is constructively meaningful to their lives. By the time they finish middle school, these students will probably know more about themselves and about what they have studied, since the whole process of schooling has become more relevant to them.

If the restructured middle schools fulfill these aims for students, surely this will promote more positive commitment among school staffs. The teacher who sees results is a more eager and imaginative learning catalyst. As such, perhaps he will forget that he once thought the high school or elementary school a better place to be. Above all, he will probably be a better teacher.

The AFT does not believe its model to be a panacea for all middle school ills, yet we strongly believe that this plan is workable and sound. We believe that if it is implemented by a school district willing to support the basic guidelines indicated in this report, the program suggested will prove successful. The cost for this program is really minimal when compared to the cost to taxpayers for providing the funds needed to pay for the social and economic consequences resulting from our failure to provide for effective education.

APPENDIX A

Suggested Activities for the Fifth Day

By paralleling many school and community activities, all sectors, pupils, parents, faculties, and residents can move toward greater homogeneity through shared interests and mutual benefits.

In the projected restructured middle school, the "fifth-day" allotment for extra-curricular activities as well as many of the relevant classroom curricula can intermesh with community needs; and in working to help satisfy these needs pupils may in turn gain valuable experience in common with their elders in coping with life's problems.

The following table of possible parallel activities is by no means definitive and complete but may serve to illustrate the almost limitless possibilities and as a framework for enlargement:

Examples of school activities	Examples of out-of-school activities
A. Student self-government and the study of organizational procedure and the history and practice of creative dissent.	A. On-the-spot lobbying internships in political, economic and/or social action clubs and storefront organizations — envelope-stuffing, duplicating, leaflettering.
B. Group guidance and counseling workshops.	B. Community-school rap sessions, lectures, workshops.
C. School beautification—anti-litter campaigns, bulletin boards, school garden murals, anti-vandalism education.	C. Neighborhood beautification and ecology watchdogging, street and minipark tree-planting, playground murals, halloween store-window painting contests.
D. Home-nursing and baby care classes and kindergarten and pre-k monitorships.	D. Child care center volunteers and paid child care aides, day camp junior counselorships. Cooperative baby-sitting agency.
E. Home economics consumerism classes and assemblies.	E. Consumer education program, exhibits, workshops.
F. Inschool work experiences for pay or other compensation: cafeteria, library, laboratory, storerooms.	F. On-the-job programs: private industry, professional offices, public institutions, co-ops. Orientation trips.
G. School journalism.	G. Community newsletters.
H. Performing arts, public speaking, dramatics, dance, creative writing, music.	H. Public affairs, "tailgate" theater, community performances, lectures, anti-drug-abuse plays.

Examples of school activities	Examples of out-of-school activities
I. Individual study and research projects.	I. Independent study outside public library, university campuses.
J. Tutoring and being tutored.	J. Tutoring and being tutored.

APPENDIX B
SUMMARY

Structure

1. School size—750 to 800 pupils
2. Class size—maximum of 20 pupils
3. Lowest grade
   a. clustered in units of 4 classes
   b. common preparation periods for clustered teachers
   c. teachers granted freedom to allocate time within the cluster
4. Middle grade
   a. beginning of elective program
   b. block programming
5. Upper grade
   a. total elective program
   b. fully individualized program
   c. fifth day activity

Personnel

1. Twelve classes per grade
2. One paraprofessional for each subject teacher
3. School aides to do all administrative assignments
4. Elected mentors for each grade to work on teacher training and curriculum planning
5. Bilingual teachers in school and community relations when needed
6. Teachers of English as a second language wherever needed
7. Six secretaries per school
8. Absent teacher reserve to be based on 10% of staff
9. Two attendance teachers per school
10. One street worker per grade
11. One laboratory assistant
12. One industrial arts assistant
13. One home economics assistant
14. Two librarians and one library assistant
15. One speech teacher
16. One clinical team per school
17. One medical team per school

Curriculum and Teacher Training

It is recommended that as part of the program, voluntary summer workshops be instituted for the entire staff with appropriate compensation. It is here that the specific staff of each school will look afresh at their curricula and devise, modify and update new ones. This dialogue must also continue during the school year. Only in this way can proper support develop and become self-perpetuating.

Modified Heterogeneity

To be used to prevent labelling and possible pre-judgment of pupils. To allow pupils to see and work towards attainable goals.

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The committee urges that numerical grades be eliminated and that subject area reports which indicate rates of progress on an individual basis be substituted.

Alternate Schools

What is still needed is something like a "half-way house" for those pupils who are so alienated from school that it is virtually impossible to get them to attend school or to do any worthwhile work if they do attend.

Student Government

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